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SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA MEETS WITH FM BEZHUASHVILI
REF: TBILISI 1604

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark X. Perry, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 27, DAS Bryza met with Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili on the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Bezhuashvili told Bryza that the Georgian government was not happy with the latest United Nations report on the situation in Abkhazia, adding that the Group of Friends should avoid focusing on technical details and instead concentrate on settlement of the conflict and return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to Abkhazia. Bryza explained that the reason the last Friends meeting was technical was because of the recent tensions in the Gali district of Abkhazia, and once the tension subsides, the Friends could get back to strategic discussions on the peace process. Bezhuashvili thanked Bryza for the strong U.S. support of Georgia in the UN Friends process, and said Georgia continues to reach out to the French and Germans to explain their position on the conflicts. He emphasized that Georgia understands the situation in the conflict zones remains tense, and it must be patient in looking for a solution. Bryza said Georgia's more measured and constructive approach over the past year had placed it in a stronger diplomatic position. Bezhuashvili said the Georgian government has invited the EU, OSCE, and Russia to serve on the Georgian governmental commission on the issue of autonomy for South Ossetia within Georgia and will invite the Venice Commission to comment on the GoG's draft paper on autonomy once it is finished. End Summary.

Georgia "not happy" with UN report on Abkhazia

¶2. (C) Bezhuashvili told Bryza that the Georgian government was not happy with the latest report from the UN Secretary General on Abkhazia. He said that Deputy Foreign Minister Manjgaladze formally raised Georgian concerns with the Group of Friends earlier on July 27 (septel), adding that the focus of the Group of Friends should return to a strategic discussion of conflict resolution and return of the IDPs and not on technical issues. Bryza noted that the reason the last Friends meeting in Bonn (reftel) was technical was because of recent tensions in Gali, and that Georgia needed to play a role in reducing such tension. He said the Friends needed to return to strategic discussions on Abkhazia, discussions that would be facilitated with the reduction of tensions in Gali. Bezhuashvili thanked Bryza for continued U.S. support of Georgia in the UN Friends process, and said his criticism was aimed at other members of the Group of Friends. He said the Europeans lack understanding of Abkhazia. He noted that the Georgians continue to engage the French and Germans on Abkhazia. Relations with Germany were improving; German Chancellor Merkel has invited President Saakashvili to Berlin in October.

¶3. (C) Bezhuashvili also said that the Georgians hoped that the upcoming renewal of the United Nations Observer Mission

to Georgia (UNOMIG) in October would produce a resolution that underscored support for Georgia's territorial integrity, called for IDP returns, and highlighted Russian obstructionism. A fallback could be a technical rollover. Bryza assured Bezhuashvili that the U.S. would remain steadfast in supporting Georgia's territorial integrity and its right and obligation to administer to its citizens in the Upper Kodori Valley. The U.S. would not be blackmailed by possible Russian threats not to renew UNOMIG's mandate unless Georgian personnel withdrew from the Upper Kodori. He also reiterated our arguments to Russia cautioning against Russian recognition of Abkhaz independence in the wake of a Kosovo decision - that Russian recognition of Abkhaz independence will damage Russian national interests in the North Caucasus, and that there can be no legitimacy for a political entity whose claims of independence derive from a referendum conducted in the wake of ethnic cleansing. Bezhuashvili replied that he thought the Russian position on Kosovo stemmed from a belief that the U.S is using the issue of Kosovo independence to undermine Russia. He said Russia fears that Kosovo independence will spur Russia's unrecognized republics to also declare independence, which would lead to a disintegration of the Russian state.

Georgia patiently looking for a solution on South Ossetia

14. (C) Bezhuashvili said that the Georgians have invited the Russians to engage them on determining South Ossetia's political status, and specifically, on a definition of autonomy. He argued that the Russians have a lot to gain from working with Georgia to resolve the South Ossetian conflict, especially greater stability in the North Caucasus. Everyone knows that South Ossetia is a bargaining chip for

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the Russians, he said, but their price is currently too high.

If the Russians stopped financing Kokoiti and agreed to a joint Georgia-Russian monitoring of the Roki tunnel, Bezhuashvili speculated that Kokoiti would be gone within a matter of weeks. He said that Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov hinted that such a deal was possible, but was "not within his competence." Georgia understands that the situation in South Ossetia remains tense, he said, and it needs to be patient and allow the peace process to continue. Bryza told Bezhuashvili that the Secretary was aware of the positive steps Georgia was taking on the conflicts and commended the Georgian government on its efforts. He suggested that Georgia's approach in recent months of providing positive incentives to attract South Ossetians back to Georgia, coupled with growing popular support for Dmitry Sanakoyev as an alternative to Kokoity had changed the trajectory of the conflict in Tbilisi's favor. The U.S. would continue pressing in the OSCE for key confidence building measures - e.g., more OSCE military observers, an OSCE checkpoint at the strategic Didi Gupta road juncture, and joint Georgian-Russian monitoring of the Roki tunnel.

15. (C) The Georgian government is currently drafting a legal framework for South Ossetian autonomy within the Republic, Bezhuashvili said, and has invited the EU, OSCE, and Russia to serve on a commission to inform the process. The Georgian government will also invite the Venice Commission to comment on their draft paper on autonomy, and Prime Minister Noghaidei will travel to Vienna in October to brief the OSCE on the process and the commission. He said Georgia continues to tell Russia that a stable South Ossetia will keep the North Caucasus stable as well, but the Russians remain unconvinced, and believe that Georgia is being used by the U.S. to undermine Russia.

16. (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this cable.
PERRY